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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the area of teachers' practical arguments (arugments consisting in the search for a plan of action), considering questions such as: How does rationality manifest itself in practice, and in specific human practices like teaching? Is practical reasoning in teaching moral? Do values of theoretical reasoning, such as universality, logical order, explicitness, and completeness translate to the practical domain? It is argued that relying on practical arguments for the improvement of teaching ignores the extent to which teaching is an act of wisdom and belongs to the contemplative life. It is contended, also, that--in representing teachers' arguments for purposes of analysis and improvement--the distinction must be maintained between simplication and misrepresentation, guarding especially against the conversion of methodological moves into stipulations about reality or appropriateness. Finally, some major philosophical difficulties in the analysis of practical reasoning are considered. It is essential to keep such difficulties in mind if work is to continue, with good purpose, in this area of practical arguments in teacher education and teaching-thinking research. (Author/JD)

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Abstract

Philosophers have been discussing whether one can improve teacher thinking--and hence, presumably, teaching and education--by improving the premises in teachers' practical arguments; that is, arguments consisting in the search for a plan of action. The assumption is that, if we can make more sure that teachers' premises have empirical reference, that they are complete and coherent, and that their overall arguments about what to do are cogent, we can make some progress toward improvement. The emphasis on arguments fits with the research interest in teacher thinking and the prevailing belief that reflection is a good thing in teaching. This paper examines the concept of practical argument, considering questions such as: How does rationality manifest itself in practice, and in specific human practices like teaching? Is practical reasoning in teaching moral? Do values of theoretical reasoning, such as universality, logical order, explicitness, and completeness translate to the practical domain? It argues that relying on practical arguments for the improvement of teaching ignores the extent to which teaching is an act of wisdom and belongs to the contemplative life. It contends, second, that--in representing teachers' arguments for purposes of analysis and improvement--we must make good the distinction between simplification and misrepresentation, guarding especially against the conversion of methodological moves into stipulations about reality or appropriateness. Finally, it considers some major philosophical difficulties in the analysis of practical reasoning that need to be kept in mind if we are to work with the notion of practical arguments in teacher education and teacher-thinking research to good purpose.

PRACTICAL ARGUMENTS ARE NO ACCOUNTS OF TEACHER THINKING: BUT THEN, WHAT IS?[1]

Margret Buchmann[2]

Introduction

In their various ways, scholars in education are committed to improvement, and philosophers in the United States are no exception. For several years now, they have been discussing whether one can improve teacher thinking--and hence, presumably, teaching and education--by improving the premises in teachers' practical arguments, that is, arguments consisting in the search for a plan of action. This notion stems from the work of Green and Fenstermacher;[3] it implies that, if we can make more sure that teachers' premises have empirical reference, that they are complete and coherent, and that their overall arguments about what to do are cogent, we can make some progress toward improvement. Underlying this notion is the idea that we will be better off to the extent that we can move from "subjective" to objective forms of reasonableness.[4]

Stuart Hampshire has expressed the philosophical attachment to rationality in thought about action with eloquence:

> The more explicit a man is in formulating to himself the ends of his action, and the grounds upon which his decisions rest, the more he is aware of himself as having made choices between specific possibilities, choices that are always subject to revision. The more self-conscious he is in his criticism of his own intentions and activities, the more he is aware of the limits of his habits of classification, limits that determine the possibilities open to him. He becomes aware also of the limits set by the conventions of communication and classification into which he was born. . . . An irrational man does not pause to establish self-consciously in his own mind the exact order of dependence of his own opinions and intentions. He is not active in reviewing the whole range of his opinions and intentions, but rather passively finds them forming and changing, without the deliberate imposition of an order on them. He is so much less free and self-determining.[5]

It is not uncharacteristic for philosophers to assume that, if we get our ideas and arguments straight, all will be well with the world. But some empirical

researchers have also been attracted by the notion of teachers' practical arguments. The emphasis on arguments fits with the research interest in teacher thinking and the prevailing belief that reflection is a good thing in teaching. It seems to give the term "reflection" a fairly clear interpretation and yields some ideas about what the improvement of teacher thinking may require: where one should start, and where one should go. Moreover, arguments can be assessed, on grounds that go beyond personal taste and preference, tradition, or power. The concept of argument in this sense carries evaluative as well as descriptive meaning, for an argument that is not sound or tenable is no argument properly speaking.

All this sounds like good news. No one doubts that there is practical as well as theoretical reasoning. With the aid of reason, we try to determine not only what is the case but also what we ought to do, thus making "practical arguments" whose purpose it is to get done what we want in a defensible way. In thinking preceding action, premises may refer to desires and duties, facts, beliefs, and possibilities, and conclusions describe plans or actions. Practical arguments often involve "ifs" and "thens," as in this simple, though overarticulate example:

> I have to give my lecture at 10:00.
> If I go by car to the university, I'll be there in time.
> So I'll go by car.

Yet, while it is clear that rules of inference in theoretical reasoning aim to preserve the truth of conclusions, it is not obvious what value, or values, rules of inference in practical arguments are meant to preserve and what it is that makes a conclusion valid when we reason practically.[6]

How does rationality manifest itself in practice and in specific human practices like teaching? Is practical reasoning in teaching moral? (Note that, in their plenitude, premises in moral reasoning include conflicting values.) Do values of theoretical reasoning, such as universality, logical

order, explicitness, and completeness translate to the practical domain? We do applaud some actions as moral in which good feeling, courage, devotion, or a simple heart set aside the claims of good judgment. Conversely, we can be wrong or confused in action in ways in which it is impossible for us to be wrong or unclear in thought alone. It will take most of us years to understand Einstein's theory of relativity (and we may even suffer pains in so doing) but this is no equivalent to the anguished mental searchings of Dorothea and Casaubon in Middlemarch, or of the Prince and his lover in the Golden Bowl, however lengthy and elaborately self-conscious those cogitations may be.

If criticism is of great import in either domain, does its point shift or change in thought about action? We criticize people, including ourselves, when we have not lived up to a promise, have been ungraciously truthful, done a good thing but half-heartedly, compromised our best self, and, generally, not done what others had a right to expect, given the circumstances. The moment of choice or of moral insight is a moment of truth only in a manner of speaking that points to ultimate things--as well as to conventions. If we are unclear about what overarching value, or values, we are trying to preserve in practical arguments, we cannot tell what their improvement requires.

And must thinking of consequence for action necessarily and centrally be "busy," and directly connected to decisions? This is not just the sort of idle question philosophers will ask. For, relying on practical arguments in the improvement of teaching ignores the extent to which teaching is an act of wisdom and belongs to the contemplative life. This is the first and most fundamental way in which the notion of practical arguments as an approach to the conceptualization and study of teacher thinking must be qualified.

I will ask, second, how--in representing teachers' arguments for purposes of analysis and improvement--we can make good the distinction between simplification and misrepresentation, guarding especially against the conversion of

methodological moves into stipulations about reality or appropriateness. Finally, I will consider some major philosophical difficulties in the analysis of practical reasoning that we need to keep in mind if we are to work with the notion of practical arguments in teacher education and teacher thinking research to good purpose. For instance, is the supposed outcome of practical reasoning, the description of a plan or action, uniquely determined? I will turn to the scholastic discussion of the active and the contemplative life to examine what part contemplation may play in teacher thinking.

Contemplation in Teacher Thinking

St. Thomas Aquinas considers the active and the contemplative life in Summa Theologiae.[7] Contemplation is an immanent activity requiring an agent but no outward effect or recipient. Beginning and ending in itself, the contemplative life has a certain freedom. In the active life, we work to affect things or other people and are often ruffled by their recalcitrance and the force of circumstance. The contemplative life also involves personal application (cogitation and meditation). But its essential qualities are those of restfulness and joy, as we come to understand some desirable or lovable good--especially any truth whatever--and dwell on it. This requires clarity of vision and serenity in the concentration of faculties. In the words of St. Thomas, contemplation refers "to a simple gaze upon a truth."[8]

As an interior act of seeing, contemplation engages the emotions, the will, and the moral virtues, insofar as the latter dispose one towards peace and purity of heart. Relieved from the quality of wanting in any immediate or distracting sense, the contemplative life does not comprise the accidental rewards of (external) labor; instead, its fulfillment lies in ultimate truths and in a perfection of the human mind and its happiness. The delights of contemplation stem from the activity itself and from the value of its admirable objects.

Since we are rational animals, we see in truth something we love and we desire to be enlightened.

Here contemplation seems to move close to examination or investigation. But, while admiration and joy are compatible with inquiry in any domain, its simplicity and repose mark off contemplation from research, logical analysis, or reflection on action which try to penetrate where contemplation aims more to receive. In manner and kind, the asceticism of contemplation is likewise different from the "self-denial" of objectivity and logic, which both encompass assertion: the laying and vindicating of claims.

Though the active and the contemplative life can be distinguished, both are forms of human life, and in an actual existence first one, then the other, form will predominate. And it is possible for action to lead to contemplation and for contemplation to lead to action: both forms of life are complementary. However, as Aquinas points out, the "return to the active life from the contemplative is by way of direction, in that the active life is guided by the contemplative."[9] Divorced from the contemplative life, the active life would be cut off from its source of value.[10]

These are strong claims, implying that action is appropriately guided by aiming to see things--objects, concepts, events, relations, people--as they are, in the first place, and that (ultimate) value cannot be conferred upon action by its conformity to human needs and wants, as aspects of utility. Yet there is no great difficulty in applying these claims to teaching, where action and decision need to flow from, and return to, the pursuit of understanding subject matter (objects, concepts, events, relations) and people, just as they are, and where action without reference to the ultimate good of learning would be without rudder; I will return to these points.

Hence it makes sense to ask, with St. Thomas, whether teaching belongs to the active or to the contemplative life. Referring to Aristotle, Aquinas

points out, first, that the ability to teach is an indication of learning. And, since wisdom or science (knowledge and truth in the widest sense) belong to the contemplative life, teaching belongs to the contemplative life. He extends this point by stating that, "it seems an office of the contemplative life to impart to an other by teaching, truth that has been contemplated."[11] Office here has the meaning of "good office," a kindness or attention in the service of others; thus he explains in another volume of Summa Theologiae, "Just as it is better to illumine than merely to shine, so it is better to give to others the things contemplated than simply to contemplate."[12]

The subject matter of teaching, or its first object, is, accordingly, the consideration and love of truth in all its forms, with the teacher taking delight in that consideration and love. Compared to the external acts of teaching, even practical arguments, this object and associated activities have logical, though not necessarily temporal, priority. In teaching, the contemplative precedes the active life because of its nature, and the nature of teaching. (Note that the life of contemplation is not to be equated with reflection-in-action, or even reflection on action.) Without aesthetic understanding, what can one say about a child's drawing, except that it is "nice" or "true to nature?" One needs to have a grasp of the concept of number--and enjoy thinking about that concept, thus complicating one's understanding--to help others think about what a number is. Still, teaching aims at those others and is conveyed through external acts, for instance, speech; and those to whom contemplated truth is communicated are therefore its second object.

That one's attention is urged on, toward the second object of teaching, also follows from the relation that there is, in human life, between what one most delights in and the wish to share it with other people, particularly one's friends. Aristotle writes in the Nicomachean Ethics, "Whatever existence means for each class of men, whatever it is for whose sake they value life, in that

they wish to occupy themselves with their friends."[13] We speak of teaching where existence means understanding. But to the extent that the concept of teaching involves as its second object other people--aiming to enlighten and perfect them--teaching belongs to the active life and requires its exertions in the spirit of fellowship and kindness.

Aquinas concludes that teaching sometimes belongs to the active life and sometimes to the contemplative life. Yet, to reiterate, in moving from contemplation to action in teaching we do not subtract the contemplative but add the active dimension. Put differently, teaching is not a life of action tempered by occasional fits of abstraction, but the active life in teaching "proceeds from the fullness of contemplation."[14]

When a child says "lightning and thunder," she probably means "flash and rumble"; to be a teacher, a person must be more like a meteorologist, poised to launch into an explanatory speech:

> The noise originates near that cumulus cloud. In principle the cloud is an electrostatic generator. The ice crystals within it produce, by friction between themselves, electric charges, the separation of which leads to a concentration of positive charge in one region of the cloud and of negative charge in another. As charge separation proceeds, the field between these charged centers (or between one of them and the earth) grows. Finally, electrical breakdown of the air occurs; we see this as lightning. It leads to a partial vacuum in the atmosphere. Surrounding air rushes in. The result is a disturbance not unlike the breaking of a lamp bulb; we hear this as thunder.[15]

The point is that the speaker does not see these things by looking; they are not visible except to the "mind's eye," and in an elaborated, conceptual vision belonging, in this case, to science. In teaching, practice without such contemplation of what is to be taught would be empty and without its distinctive purpose. The teacher might still do something worthwhile but he would not teach.

Moreover, the second object of teaching is also, and properly, an object of contemplation, not just of action. This is suggested by Aristotle's words which connect the impulse to share what we value--or the giving of good things--with

our valuing of other people. I will adapt an example from Iris Murdoch[16] to suggest what process the contemplation of other people is, and how that way of looking fits into teaching.

Suppose a secondary school teacher, Miss Jacobs, feels herself affected by a sense of hostility toward a student. From the first day of school, John strikes her as uncouth in behavior and raw in intellect, overfamiliar, and excitable--always tiresomely adolescent. Miss Jacobs herself is a quiet person, a bit severe and spinsterish but intelligent and well-intentioned. She knows that she is not at her best with rambunctious boys of that age; in fact, she cannot say that she likes adolescents. A term passes. But Miss Jacobs does not perfect her picture of John as an impossible boy, firming it up in outline and elaborating it in detail.

Miss Jacobs has come to see John as endearingly awkward; his raw intellect has become, in her eyes, an untutored intelligence that is a challenge; John seems to her now not overfamiliar and excitable but trusting and emotional to the point of being vulnerable. Protective, almost tender, feelings supplant her earlier hostility. What has happened? John has not changed; he is still a rather pestilential adolescent. Nor has Miss Jacobs been busy in any external sense, or devising plans of action to change him. On the surface, Miss Jacobs has substituted one set of (moral) words for another, with positive instead of negative meaning. But, deep down, she has been thinking, deliberately, until she could raise her sights to John.

There are cases in which such a process might result in delusions. Yet let us further suppose that our case is correctly described by saying that Miss Jacobs has <u>looked</u> at John (and beyond the stereotype), that she has focused her attention on <u>him</u> (and away from her sensitivities and limitations), achieving an inward stance and progress of intrinsic worth and attraction. Part of this progress stems from a transcendence of habitual and conventional modes of

classification; the greater part, however, stems from seeing John not just with accuracy but with kindness. Very likely, Miss Jacobs will be relieved and uplifted because she has managed to see John in a different light; and John, too, will be buoyed up by his teacher's change of mind.

Iris Murdoch summarizes this attitude and process in the concept of "attention," a form of contemplation central to the thought of Simone Weil. Interior to the mind, attention involves a personal application that does not so much affect its object as the person concentrating her gaze upon it. This process and stance opens the mind to the understanding of another person as an individual, worthy of regard--in the sense of observant attention and kindly feeling. Though it requires being simple, such attention is not easy; it is the contemplation of other people, and the delight taken in that consideration, the love and admiration of their truth, which is their individuality, separate and distinct from oneself. In this way of looking, to quote Simone Weil, the "soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth."[17] The progression associated with the concepts of love and justice implies that attentive perception is fallible and open-ended, infinitely perfectible and inherently appealing.

Perhaps when teachers tell us that they decided to go into teaching because they love children some mean loving to look at children attentively: holding them in regard--noticing, caring, valuing--thus seeing them not only accurately but justly and lovingly. The work of attention is never finished; it is a source of self-sustaining joy not readily exhausted. Surely, this form of contemplation is required by teaching as well, though we may shrug off its ordinary manifestations in teacher talk. One might say that teaching requires a pure heart and a very open eye, trained toward knowledge and people, and alight with a regard that raises one's sights.

Teachers' Practical Arguments

Let me go from the sublime to something less lofty and exalted. What do American philosophers of education actually have in mind when they speak of teachers' practical arguments? Here is an example.

> As a teacher, I want to teach in ways that yield as much student learning as possible.
> Well-managed classrooms yield gains in learning.
> Direct instruction is a proven way to manage classrooms.
> My students and I are together in this classroom.
> ACTION: (I am organizing my class according to the principles of direct instruction.)[18]

Arid and unconvincing, this example does not even qualify as a caricature, for the most characteristic and striking features of teaching are missing. Its first object, subject matter, has no part in this argument and its second object, other persons, is brought in only by mentioning. The teacher likewise remains a pale abstraction, whereas when we act, we act as persons, even in our roles. Educational research is represented as proven and its relevance to action as unproblematic. What about conflicts of goals and values? Is direct, didactic instruction equally effective for all educational goals? Does social order imply learning? Is "learning" something generic? The whole example sounds as if there were no room for interpretation and doubt, as if matters were entirely straightforward in the classroom.

More adequately represented, the arguments of teachers will, of necessity, involve contents, persons, conflicts, and interpretations; together with criticism and regrets, these elements account for the continuity and inconclusiveness of teacher thinking, as well as for its abiding interest. Related to this, these arguments will always be defeasible, for their conclusions can be faulted or made void. Coming to a decision is not like climbing up a ladder of beliefs and desires and, having reached its final rung, jumping into action to bring about a desirable state of affairs. The difficulty is that, having reached a conclusion, there are always further premises that, being added, could turn

the pondered action into rather less of a good thing, or reverse its course altogether.

The image of the argumentative ladder is misleading also because "it fails to represent adequately something which is intuitively of great importance in practical reasoning: the weighing up of the pros and cons of a particular course of action."[19] Most any action has its liabilities, being subject to the possibility of ignoring some good or promoting something undesirable. Since in teaching, furthermore, one person is directly trying to improve other persons, teacher thinking is a species of moral reasoning, different from the reasoning of an architect concerned with building safety--or beauty--or that of a banker managing a stock portfolio to the satisfaction of a client. In asking questions about the advancement of teacher thinking, we are asking questions about what should figure in teachers' minds in order for them to be able to occupy themselves with others for purposes of understanding.

Consider, first, the interpretive aspects of situational premises. Situations that call for teacher action are rarely defined simply by the fact that the protagonists have assembled in a room together. In fact, people don't bother to say such things to themselves. Instead, teachers begin by asking what the situation is that calls for action. While some premises have a sharper empirical reference than others, situations are not simply "read out" from the data. People ask themselves, "What shall I do?" in response to some concrete, particular situation that will make circumstantial demands on their practical and moral perception, which is circumscribed also by what they <u>can</u> do. All pertinent concerns will not be readily apparent, nor will their order be necessarily hierarchical or, for that matter, fixed. Particular situations prompt people to reorder their concerns, keeping alive their sense of the many different points of living and acting, even within the context of a given role.

Rarely can we attend to all pertinent concerns; actions therefore tend to leave residues--things that still ought to be done.

Defensible wanting does, indeed, call for thought. There must be thought about the other possible consequences of pursuit of a want by a given means. There must be thought about the existence of other wants that may require energies, time, and other resources expended in pursuit of a given want. There must be consideration of the effects of satisfaction of a want on the character of the wanter. These concerns are manifestations of the involvement of morality in wanting and acting.

Though shaped by tradition, habits, and the role requirements of social institutions, people can come up with indefinitely many, at times incompatible, interpretations of a situation, depending on mostly unformulated assumptions. These assumptions not only selectively and habitually focus attention and active interest, they also are robust and inflexible--and this often for good reasons, as when teachers take it for granted that they are supposed to look after the educational interests of children. Nevertheless, teachers can, like all of us, misconceive and misdescribe situations; things, for instance, that call for action (such as duties) may be ignored and features acted on (such as characteristics of children) can be distorted or irrelevant. In teaching as a form of moral action, people can be blamed for a lack or refusal of vision in relation to children or subject matter.

Competing interpretations lead to conflicting goods, and goods can be competing within situations that vary in their immediacy. There is this classroom, even this hour, in which students, teacher, and some content come together for many possible purposes, frequently at variance with one another. There are also institutions and social roles with inconsistent goods internal to them, such as fostering individual talent and equality, self-determination and obedience in schools. William James made it clear that, in general,

conflicting goods abound: "Spending our money, yet growing rich; taking our holiday, yet getting ahead with our work; shooting and fishing, yet doing no hurt to the beasts; gaining no end of experience, yet keeping our youthful freshness of heart."[20]

Teaching routinely involves multiple pairs of obligations--binding claims on practical and contemplative attention--where, if one is satisfied, the other cannot be. But attending to one student who needs encouragement does not make the teacher's obligation to see to the learning of the whole class disappear. And there is no simple answer to the question of how to honor the personal liberty of students while teaching them academic subjects, since disciplinary arguments must often override personal beliefs. Still, it is very important not to step all over evolving minds. Philosophical and empirical studies indicate that such moral dilemmas are "resolved" by successive decision installments that bypass one horn of the dilemma and deal with residues later.[21] Accordingly, teachers' arguments are open-ended processes--riddled by pros and cons--in which the conflict of values can at best be toned down to coexistence. "Redressing" conflict in this fashion affects the criterion of coexistence. Unlike the criterion of consistency, it becomes, as Richard Wollheim stresses, "personal and affective"; what co-existence requires, "is the reduction of conflict at least to a level that the person himself has discovered he can tolerate."[22]

Intentional activity is continuous, and relations of past and future are inherent in any action, as a carrying forward of intentions within a fabric of personal being. People consider actions not merely with regard to other people but in relation to themselves, to life, to time, even to eternity. While occurring within the context of a social role (teacher) and institution (school), teachers' arguments are personal also because the "active 'reassessing' and 'redefining' which is a main characteristic of live personality often suggests and

demands a checking procedure which is a function of an individual history."[23] Hence there is nothing metaphysical about maintaining that one cannot adequately describe teacher arguments without introducing persons who make them, persons who lead a life:

> There are persons, they exist; persons lead lives, they live; and as a result, in consequence--in consequence, that is, of the way they do it--there are lives, of which those who lead them may, for instance, be proud, or feel ashamed.[24]

Ineluctably one's own, action commits one, affecting the inner self and the self as it appears to others, as well as those others and the course of one's life. And what is done, is done: Only the thought of it can be changed. It is therefore not true that choices are always subject to revision. Teacher arguments, moreover, are not self-arguments or monologues but, at least, dialogues, and often many-sided conversations in which a multitude of claims are made, or could be put forth. In thinking about action, teachers will hear a concert of voices, rarely in tune.

Yet to analyze teachers' reasoning, one has to simplify it and divide it into temporal segments or discrete events. Due to this methodological move, intentional activity is misrepresented, in Stuart Hampshire's words, "as a set of actions, each of which is a response to a definite situation, as a statement may be an answer to a definite question."[25] Thus one loses the sense that teachers create lives in consort with others, lives meant to exemplify an ideal within a fabric of personal being. Looking at thought about action in this artificial fashion is not inconsistent with trying to read teachers' actions against the background of a continuous, many-sided process that resonates, in choice, to a given form of the good life, but it certainly makes it more difficult. This open-ended process invokes criteria of direction and coherence in a specific vision of goodness, the interrelatedness of actions and people, the identity of persons, the structure of the disciplines, and the requirements

of social institutions. In their different ways, these criteria impose limits on thought and action; and, in themselves, they are in no way combined, or adapted to one another, so as to form a consistent and orderly whole.

Trouble arises when methodological moves in the spirit of analysis are converted into stipulations about reality; Dewey termed this confusion of distinctions in thought with distinctions in reality the "analytic fallacy":

> The trouble is not with analysis, but with the philosopher who ignores the context in which and for the sake of which the analysis occurs. . . . The result [of committing the analytic fallacy] is invariably some desiccation and atomizing of the world in which we live or of ourselves.[26]

That trouble gets compounded when fallacious assumptions about reality--such as our temptation to think about action as divisible into discrete happenings--are further converted into stipulations about appropriateness, when teachers are not only supposed to think in ways that suit the exigencies of analysis, but when prescriptions for their practical arguments are derived from these artifacts of method. Though what is troublesome here is more complicated than putting the cart before the horse, the effect is the same: People get stuck.

What does my argument so far suggest about the notion that philosophers and researchers can improve teacher thinking by improving the premises of practical arguments? Thought in relation to teaching as action does not account for teacher thinking, the improvement of which requires an advancement of contemplation in the first place. To be teachers, people must (in the sense of inevitably) raise their sights to knowledge and other people. Thoughts flowing from "the fullness of contemplation" turn to practice in a union of affective and cognitive response that aims to preserve the good content of choices and the integrity of self. Teachers must also want to do the virtuous actions required of teaching and enjoy performing them. To move teachers' minds from where they are to where they might better be, the concept of practical argument is

insufficient, for teacher thinking depends on contemplation and a quality of wanting.

Analyses of teacher thinking have to be informed by an understanding of conceptual and contextual unities and particular connections; at the very least, we should not fool ourselves about just what analysis has left behind, pretending that those things are not important or never existed. Within an argument, taken singly, the idea of completing premises will not work when we factor in the plenitude of goods; rather, we have to deal with the criterion of coexistence, dependent on personal capacities for tolerating levels of anxiety. A simple progression from "subjective" to objective forms of reasonableness is not a viable prescription when we take this point and the general idea of live personality involved in the criticism of action seriously. Nor does criticism of action imply the possibility of revision; it is not only that regrets are usually vain but that the person thinking about what has been done--and even the person who has come through a nontrifling self-argument--is not the same person as before the fact. Subjective ideals and desires are qualified by social morality, and the illuminating or distracting presence of other people. Questions of empirical truth are complicated by the valuative and interpretive aspects of situations; this holds for both research and practice.

There is no rescue in formal validity either, for plausible practical arguments such as the following are often illogical:

> I want to raise students' achievement scores.
> If I teach to the test, I will raise their achievement scores.
> So I'll teach to the test.

In theoretical reasoning, this argument is not valid, for 'q. If p then q. So p.' is the fallacy of affirming the consequent (which, by the way, also affects the practical argument I have cited in the first section.) This is easy to see in another example. While it may be true that I will inherit a fortune when my mother dies and that I do want a fortune badly, it does not follow that I want

my mother to die. But I have thought, sometimes, that I need some really bright students in my seminar; that, say, Peter and Helen are really bright; and that I, therefore, need to have Peter and Helen sign up for the seminar. Similarly, we could imagine Miss Jacobs musing that she wants to give John a good grade; that "A" is a good grade, (though this premise is unlikely to be spelled out); and, hence, that she wants to give John an "A." If an "A" is not synonymous with "a good grade," this practical conclusion is as fallacious as mine. For, though I may have met an animal--and an elephant certainly is an animal--I cannot, therefore, claim to have met an elephant. As Anthony Kenny points out, such arguments are, nevertheless, "appropriate verbalizations of reasons of the kind which are operative with us when we make up our minds what to do."[27]

Practical reasons, furthermore, do not necessitate: They only incline. Because of the general defeasibility of practical arguments, we are never compelled <u>not</u> to disagree with a conclusion about action. A disagreement with a given practical conclusion does not imply that people are unreasonable or capricious. Teaching to the test ceases to seem advisable if, upon examination, the content of the test is found to be wanting in educational worth. Although, if passing the test is a condition for access to higher levels of education, this substantive consideration may be overridden, in its turn. But then, for some children access to higher education will mean alienation from their families, perhaps anomie in adult life: Should that not <u>also</u> be considered?--And so on. Furthermore, the connections between premises and (descriptions of) intended actions are loose in several ways.

The same reasons occurring as premises in practical arguments can legitimate different and incompatible descriptions of action; and different, incompatible actions, in turn, will answer to any given description. Thus drilling, explaining, demonstrating, tutoring, informing, lecturing do each accord with

"teaching to the test." Of course, practical conclusions may not be acted on at all. Beyond weakness of will, or the common failure to act up to all that one believes, people sometimes do things they consider wrong, even if they know the right thing to do and could do it. There are things that can be done yet cannot be done, for people get themselves into corners out of which there may be only one mode of egress.

Another basic difficulty with practical arguments derives from the fact that the concept of "intended action" is itself indeterminate. Most actions are susceptible to what Joel Feinberg calls the "accordion effect," or that "feature of our language, whereby a man's action can be described almost as narrowly or as broadly as we please . . . an action, like the folding musical instrument, can be squeezed down to a minimum or else stretched way out."[28] Let me illustrate this effect with one of Anton Chekhov's stories.

A young woman, well-read and travelled, elegant and educated, returns to her home in Russia's endless steppe. Vera Ivanovna Kardina becomes mistress of the family estate with good intentions, hoping to improve herself and her surroundings. The gentry is a humdrum set, however, and, when lively, rather crude. Though some estates and factories have schools, no one considers peasants human beings. Well aware of all this, Vera becomes vexed with the heavy stupidity of people around her and her own lassitude. She does not know how to fill her life with absorbing tasks; instead, the steppe seems to absorb her. Marriage would of course give her a station in life with attendant duties, but she finds the good works open to her--teaching peasants, visiting the sick in their huts--as unattractive as Dr. Neshchapov, the eligible bachelor. Nor does she see much sense in doing good in these small ways, as long as injustice and oppression continue as they are, at large.

Worn out with galling questions about her life, and brought down low in self-respect and mood, Vera is irritated beyond endurance by the pale and

frightened maid-of-all-work. Turning upon Alyona, she cries, "Flog her!" Everyone is only too willing to comply. Cold with horror, Vera reflects on her deed as something she must never forget. Vera resolves to act; she will marry. And her resolution is the perfectly intelligible outcome of a moral argument never spelled out by Chekhov, except insofar as its premises are woven into the story. But is <u>marriage</u> Vera's action? Chekhov stretches the accordion way out in describing what she makes up her mind to do, and to take as her life:

> When she was married she would keep house, doctor the peasants, teach school . . . . And that constant dissatisfaction with herself and everyone else, this succession of bad mistakes that loom up like a mountain before you whenever you look back on your past, she would accept as her real life, her destiny, and she would expect nothing better.[29]

Teacher actions, likewise, are susceptible to narrow and broad descriptions which may include effects on students' feelings or on their future careers, depending on how many, and what kinds of, effects are included in the description of action. In the failure of rational and moral self-sufficiency, Chekhov's story supplies a lesson relevant to my discussion of rationality and action in teaching. Lacking awareness was not Vera's problem. Yet, having failed in her first aspirations, Vera need not fail in wanting and leading the life of a good landowner, with many components of intrinsic worth, harmonious with the universals of a good human life, and conforming, perhaps tragically, to the contradictions of history and place.

<u>So What Follows?</u>

Though it is hard to deny the value of complete and coherent premises, of univocality and guaranteed inference, it is a mistake to believe that teachers' arguments can and should <u>rely on</u> these values. Insisting on them may show more about some philosophers than about these arguments and practical reasoning. Thus Kenny concludes: "The notion of a premise which is complete enough to prevent defeasibility while specific enough to entail a practical conclusion is

surely chimerical."[30] Their arguments about what to do do not drive teachers to unavoidable conclusions; there is something much more inevitable in the way that one good sentiment leads to another or an amiable action springs from personal happiness. Practical inferences, such as they are, are not unmistakable in meaning but capable of many and inconsistent interpretations.

Immersed and vulnerable, teacher thinking is thoroughly human: Within their role, teachers have to live with coexisting values, themselves, and other people as best they can. Reasons are not wanting for trying to choose action harmonious with one's best self and a (given) form of human activity, and never mind <u>all</u> the specific possibilities that may be open. Attempts to represent teachers' arguments should capture some of their moral, personal, conflicted, interpretive and open-ended nature, which involves beliefs and desires in all of these aspects, and striving for goodness in the concept of teaching itself. Analyses should seize on what is characteristic about teaching: its objects in both of the senses Aquinas employs and its conversational nature, for instance. And the very possibility of an assessment of teacher thinking is bound up in the ongoing, inconclusive nature of moral reasoning in relation to teaching.

The urge to simplify is legitimate and strong. But it must be resisted where it is not only misleading but liable to cultivate a failure of moral imagination which is no part of common sense. Nor should the idea of order get in the way of preserving what we most deeply consider worth saving in practical arguments, which is the good content of choices.[31] Rationality in teaching cannot ask for more than moral life is capable of giving. In asking for more, thought will satisfy its desires at pains of irrationality. Much of teacher thinking is about the kind of difficult, if not hard, cases of ordinary life where the aspiration to freedom as rational self-determination seems rather limiting, and the identification of the exact order of dependence of all one's opinions is somewhat pointless. In the last analysis, it is not the ancestry

of beliefs but the goodness of intentions that is at issue. Besides, as Locke asked,

> Who almost is there that hath the leisure, patience, and means to collect together all the proofs concerning most of the opinions he has, so as safely to conclude that he hath a clear and full view; and that there is no more to be alleged for his better information? And yet we are forced to determine ourselves on the one side or other. The conduct of our lives, and the management of our great concerns, will not bear delay: for those depend, for the most part, on the determination of our judgment in points wherein we are not capable of certain and demonstrative knowledge, and wherein it is necessary for us to embrace the one side or the other.[32]

Honest efforts to represent, justly, the characteristic, many-sided aspects of teachers' arguments will enrich understanding and future deliberations; sensitive descriptions of inspired subject matter teaching and of teacher contemplation may prove enlightening here. Some return to pre-philosophical ideas will help in these efforts, which imply a partial surrender of those ideas of progress and control that typify theoretical reasoning. A fitting philosophical view of thought in relation to teaching can be supported by the Aristotelian and, particularly, Thomist tradition. Both accord goodness the place of truth in practical reasoning and are consistent with seeing teaching as a given form of the good life, while the latter casts the defeasibility of practical arguments as the fundamental ground for the freedom of will.[33] If proposals for action contained in practical conclusions have both good and bad aspects and if other, incompatible conclusions can be drawn from the same argument, choosing cannot be a matter of entailment. And perhaps it would make sense for philosophers to examine just what it means to be the kind of person living the life of a teacher, thinking as a teacher about what to do.

Footnotes

[1]The first draft of this paper was presented at a colloquium at the Institute for Research on Teaching, Michigan State University, October 8, 1987. Parts of the third section have been adapted from "Impractical Philosophizing About Teachers' Arguments," Educational Theory, 37(4) (1987): 409-411.

[2]Margret Buchmann is coordinator of the Conceptual Analytic Project and Professor of teacher education at Michigan State University. In writing this essay, the author has received encouragement and advice from Robert Floden, David Cohen, Anthony Kenny, John Wilson, Susan Florio-Ruane and Deborah Loewenberg Ball.

[3]Thomas F. Green, "Teacher Competence," Educational Theory 26 (1976): 249-258. Gary D. Fenstermacher, "Philosophy of Research on Teaching: Three Aspects," in Handbook of Research on Teaching, ed. Merlin C. Wittrock, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 37-49.

[4]See Thomas F. Green, The Activities of Teaching (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971).

[5]Stuart Hampshire, Thought and Action (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 267-268.

[6]For the points in this paragraph, see Anthony Kenny, Will, Freedom and Power (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976), especially chap. V.

[7]Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 46, Action and Contemplation (2a2ae 179-182), ed. Jordan Aumann, O.P. (New York: Blackfriars, 1966).

[8]Ibid., p. 23.

[9]Ibid., p. 83.

[10]Ibid., see Appendix 6, p. 117.

[11]Ibid., p. 61.

[12]Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 47, The Pastoral and Religious Lives, (2a2ae 183-189), p. 205.

[13]Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1172a1.

[14]Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 47, p. 205.

[15]Norwood Russell Hanson, Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundation of Sceince (Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 60-61.

[16]Iris Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1985), see pp. 17-23.

[17]The Simone Weil Reader, ed. George A. Panichas (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1977), p. 51.

[18]Fenstermacher, "Philosophy of Research on Teaching: Three Aspects," p. 43.

[19]Anthony Kenny, Will, Freedom and Power, p. 95.

[20]William James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," in The Moral Philosophy of William James, ed. J. Roth (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), p. 182.

[21]Ruth B. Marcus, "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency." Journal of Philosophy 77 (1980): 121-136; and Magdalene Lampert, "How Do Teacher Manage To Teach: Perspectives on Problems in Practice," Harvard Educational Review 55(2) (1985): 178-194.

[22]Richard Wollheim, The Thread of Life (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 184.

[23]Iris Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good, p. 26.

[24]Richard Wollheim, The Thread of Life, p. 2.

[25]Stuart Hampshire, Thought and Action, p. 192.

[26]John Dewey, "Context and Thought," in On Experience, Nature, and Freedom: Representative Selections, ed. Richard Bernstein (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1960), pp. 88-110, p. 93.

[27]See Anthony Kenny, Will, Freedom, and Power, p. 73.

[28]Joel Feinberg, Doing and Deserving (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 134.

[29]Anton Chekhov, "At Home", in The Portable Chekhov, ed. and trans. Avrahm Yarmolinsky (New York: Viking Press, 1976) pp. 296-311, p. 311.

[30]Anthony Kenny, Will, Freedom, and Power, p. 94.

[31]Martha C. Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1986), see especially chap. X for this and several other points that have been helpful for my conclusion.

[32]John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, vol. 2, ed. Alexander C. Fraser (New York: Dover Publications, 1959) p. 371.

[33]See Anthony Kenny, Will, Freedom, and Power, pp. 93-95.